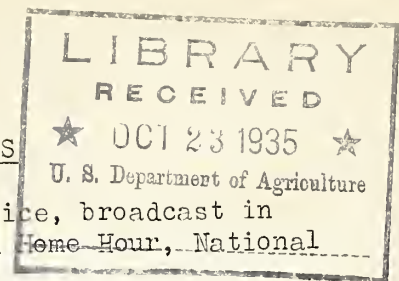


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FOREST LANDS AND FOREST-FARM COMMUNITIES



A radio talk by Joseph A. Fitzwater, Forest Service, broadcast in the Department of Agriculture period, National Farm and Home Hour, National Broadcasting Company, Friday, September 27, 1935.

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During the summer of 1934, twelve prominent American lumbermen went abroad. Not for pleasure, but to study forest lands and their management in certain Central European countries.

Returning, they brought with them a lot of interesting - and significant - information. Here, for example, is what one of those lumbermen has to say about forests, unemployment, and forest communities over there. I quote from his report.

"We saw the forests - the proof of their remarkable development was there. We were advised that they all had been created by the hand of man. The hours of labor must have been enormous.

"As we traveled, we saw many small, well kept towns and villages inhabited by robust and healthy people." Some, he adds, were forest-farm communities with well built homes and tillable land from which came food for family larders. Many others were villages and small towns such as are found in America.

"We learned", the report says, "that many of these communities supported their populations, even through major economic calamities, without serious unemployment and without huge relief expenditures. So that no able-bodied individual need be compelled to embarrass himself by seeking support from someone else during periods of adversity. We were informed that the answer to this condition was largely in the forests.

"Many villages, towns and sometimes the largest cities," this lumberman continues, "own community forests x x x which provide healthful recreational facilities for the people, revenue for local governments, work for unemployed during depression periods. And," adds this hard-headed business man, "over a period of years, revenues from these community forests have been more than the expense of creating and sustaining them."

Contrast this present-day old-world picture with current conditions in our own country, where all too frequently privately owned forests have been mined and stripped; with ghost towns scattered from Virginia to Oregon, from the Canadian line to the Mexican with inhabitants who, unable to migrate with an ever-shifting lumber industry, are now on the dole.

Why this striking difference?

The immediate reason, as the National Resources Board report brings out, is because forests in Central Europe have for centuries been treated as products of the soil susceptible, like other crops, of renewal and management. Whereas in the United States forests have been stripped without regard to their

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future or the social and economic welfare of dependent agricultural and industrial communities.

Orderly forest harvesting is, then, an immediate reason for stable, permanent and prosperous forest-farm communities. A more basic, more fundamental one is the point of view of the forest owner.

In the United States, forest property is regarded as a possession with which the owner can do as he wishes. And here, of the 395 million acres of privately owned, commercial forest land, 74 million acres have already been devastated; in recent years 41 million acres are burned annually; more than 95% still lacks adequate forest management.

Consequences of this forest exploitation have reached far into our social and economic structure. Following communities which have been abandoned, local agriculture and labor have been left without markets, taxes have become delinquent, community bonds have gone by default. And with forests cleared from hillsides, rains have run off quickly, floods have been aggravated, top soil has been washed from fertile acres, streams, dams, and harbors have filled with silt.

A marked contrast, certainly, to the Central European conditions which those twelve lumbermen saw. For there, the owner of sustained-yield forest property is its custodian. As such, he always builds it up, through adequately managed and continuous harvesting operations. Never is he permitted to cut his forest more rapidly than it is replaced by current growth.

As a result, forest communities there are stable and prosperous. "And," - quoting again from my lumberman friend, - "forest owners, large and small, have been the best situated and the most generally prosperous of all classes during the past two decades; European bankers, even during the present depression, rank timber investments among the highest of all investments."

There is, it would seem, far more than mere coincidence in the combination, - in this country, - of social devastation and the viewpoint that owners of forest properties may do with them as they see fit. More than mere coincidence, too, in that old-world combination of stable, well kept forest-farm communities and the viewpoint - there - that owners are custodians of their forest properties.

It is even possible that this matter of viewpoint comes close to being the very heart of our forest problem. Wide acceptance of the custodianship idea might, it would seem, help solve the problem.

Which is something worth thinking about. For forest lands constitute almost one-third the area of the continental United States; our forest problem is to make those lands help support, with some sense of security and stability, their fair share of our country's population.

And in solving that problem lies the opportunity to establish, as an integral part of our social structure, stable, well-kept forest-farm communities in which healthy, happy people may live, even in times of adversity, without fear of the dole or the need to seek support from friends or neighbors.